

UA 289/91

Death Threats

28 August 1991

GUATEMALA:

Amílcar MÉNDEZ URÍZAR

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Amnesty International has learned of a highly disturbing incident, involving new death threats issued against human rights activist and president of Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam" (CERJ), Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal", Amílcar Méndez Urizar.

On Saturday 24 August 1991, Amílcar Méndez received the following typed message, which was delivered to the CERJ office in Zone 1 of Guatemala City. Amílcar Méndez, his wife and young daughter had travelled the previous day to Guatemala City to attend a meeting on 26 August 1991 called by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, and spent the nights of 23 and 24 August 1991 at the CERJ office. The letter containing the death threat was discovered by Manuel Calel Morales, a member of CERJ on the morning of 24 August 1991 when he picked up the newspapers delivered to the door of the CERJ office.

"AMILCAR MENDEZ URIZAR, LA COMANDANCIA DE JAGUAR JUSTICIERO HA SIDO INFORMADA QUE USTED ESTA PARTICIPANDO CON LOS APATRIDAS DE LA URNG. QUE USTED FUE FUNDADOR DEL CUC Y CERJ QUE TANTA SANGRE HAN DERRAMADO EN EL PUEBLO DE GUATEMALA ESPECIFICAMENTE EN EL PUEBLO DEL QUICHE. COMO UNICA ADBERTENCIA [SIC] LE INFORMAMOS QUE TIENE DIEZ DIAS DE VIDA YA QUE SU PARTICIPACION CON EL COMUNISMO NOS COMPROMETE A DECLARARLO ENEMIGO DE LA LIBERTAD EN CONSECUENCIA REO DE MUERTE.-

POR UNA GUATEMALA LIBRE DEL COMUNISMO.  
J.J.

SEPTIEMBRE MES DE LA PATRIA... NO TENEMOS HORA NI DIA...  
ES CUESTION DE TIEMPO Y OPORTUNIDAD... PERO TE LLEGARA."

"AMILCAR MENDEZ URIZAR, THE COMMAND OF JAGUAR JUSTICIERO (AVENGING JAGUAR) HAS BEEN INFORMED THAT YOU HAVE COLLABORATED WITH THE ANTI-PATRIOTIC URNG<sup>1</sup>. THAT YOU WERE FOUNDING MEMBER OF CUC<sup>2</sup> AND CERJ, THAT HAVE SPILT SO MUCH GUATEMALAN BLOOD, ESPECIALLY THE PEOPLE OF QUICHÉ. YOUR WORK WITH COMMUNISM COMPELS US TO DECLARE YOU AN ENEMY OF LIBERTY AND CONSEQUENTLY UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH AND AS SUCH WE ARE WARNING YOU ONLY ONCE THAT YOU HAVE TEN DAYS LEFT TO LIVE.

FOR A COMMUNIST-FREE GUATEMALA  
J.J.

SEPTEMBER INDEPENDENCE MONTH...WE DO NOT HAVE AN HOUR NOR A DAY...ITS A QUESTION OF TIME AND OPPORTUNITY...BUT IT WILL HAPPEN."

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<sup>1</sup> URNG. Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union), is a coalition of four guerrilla groups.

<sup>2</sup> CUC Comité de Unidad Campesina (Committee for Peasant Unity), an Indian peasant league was founded in 1978 and was forced underground after suffering massive human rights violations at the hands of the armed forces in the early 1980's. CUC reemerged in 1987 and is a participating member of the Unidad de Acción Sindical y Popular (UASP), a broad coalition of labour and popular organizations.

The typed death threat which was delivered to the Guatemala City CERJ office, was in fact addressed to the CERJ headquarters at the home of Amílcar Méndez in Santa Cruz del Quiché, department of el Quiché. This would suggest that the authors knew that Amílcar Méndez was to spend the night in Guatemala City, and had either been following him, monitoring his telephone or had access to army information about the forthcoming meeting with the armed forces Chief of Staff. The death threat was signed by the Jaguar Justiciero, a so-called "death squad", to whom many killings and "disappearances" have been repeatedly attributed in the past. Although previous governments and military regimes characterized these squads as extremist groups "out of government control", Amnesty International has concluded, on the basis of available evidence, that they are made up of military and security force personnel acting under superior orders. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Amílcar Méndez as well as for the safety of all CERJ members.

Amílcar Méndez called a press conference later on 24 August 1991 to denounce the threats. The Minister of Interior, Fernando Hurtado Prem and the Human Rights Procurator, Ramiro de León Carpio, after learning about the threats, joined the CERJ president at the press conference. Both men promised that measures would be taken to protect Amílcar Méndez.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

CERJ was formed in July 1988 to protect indigenous people's rights. It has been particularly active in protesting at peasants being forced to join the ostensibly voluntary Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols. Article 34 of the Guatemalan Constitution, which recognizes the right to freedom of association, states that no-one may be forced to serve in self defence groups. The authorities maintain the patrols are voluntary, but Amnesty International knows of scores of cases where peasants who have not wished to do patrol service have been labelled "subversives" by the army and subjected to harassment, death threats, "disappearances" and extrajudicial execution. The abuses have been carried out by uniformed soldiers as well as by men in plain clothes believed to be members of the security forces or acting under their orders.

CERJ has, since its foundation, been the target of a wide range of human rights violations. Since March 1990, at least 9 members are known to have been killed in circumstances suggesting official involvement. Because of his human rights work, CERJ president Amílcar Méndez has been singled out as a target by the security forces. On 15 April 1991, four armed men tried to abduct Amílcar Méndez in Zone 11 of Guatemala City. He only managed to escape when several people in the vicinity intervened. In May 1991, he again received anonymous telephone threats telling him that he would not escape and neither would his wife or children. (See UA 128/91, AMR 34/13/91, 18 April 1991 and follow-up AMR 34/21/91, 23 May 1991).

President Jorge Serrano Elías took office in Guatemala in January 1991. During his presidential campaign he had pledged to ensure protection of human rights. However, Amnesty International remains seriously concerned at what appears to be a serious deterioration in the human rights situation in the country in past months, including an increased number of killings, death threats, torture and "disappearances". As in past years, the choice of victim and the manner in which the abuses have been carried out suggest the involvement of members of the official security forces.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern at renewed death threats against CERJ president, Amílcar Méndez;
- asking for guarantees for his safety and for the safety of other CERJ members;
- asking for an immediate and impartial investigation into the written death threat;
- urging that the results of the investigation be made public and that those found to be responsible for the threats be brought to justice;

**APPEALS TO:**

**1. S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías**

**[Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr.  
Presidente]**

Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Presidente Serrano  
Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU**

**Faxes: + 502 2 537472;  
+ 502 2 519702**

**2. Minister of Interior:**

Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem  
**[Salutation: Señor Ministro]**  
Ministro de Gobernación  
Despacho Ministerial  
Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación  
Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Telexes: 5085 MINGOB GU**

**Faxes: + 502 2 518105**

**COPIES TO:**

President of Human Rights Commission of Congress:

Padre Andrés Girón León  
Presidente  
Comisión de Derechos Humanos  
Congreso Nacional de la República  
9 Av. 9-48, Zona 1  
Guatemala, Guatemala

Attorney General:

Señor Acisclo Valladares  
Procurador General de la Nación  
Procuraduría General de la Nación  
18 Calle 10-36  
Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala

Señores

Consejo de Comunidades Etnicas "Runujel Junam" (CERJ)  
5a Avenida 3-13, Zona 5  
Santa Cruz del Quiché

**3. Minister of Defence:**

Gral. Luis Francisco Mendoza García  
**[Salutation: Señor Ministro]**  
Ministro de Defensa  
Ministerio de Defensa  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Ministro Defensa Mendoza  
Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU**

**Faxes: + 502 2 537472**

**4. Human Rights Procurator:**

Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio  
Procurador de Derechos Humanos  
Avenida Simeón Cañas 10-61  
Zona 2,  
Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Procurador Derechos Humanos  
Guatemala, Guatemala**

Guatemala

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7a Avenida 11-79

Edificio Galerias España, 6o piso

Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 October 1991.